AMONG SCHOOLTEACHERS

On November 19, the Soviet met to discuss the all-Russian strike of the post and telegraph employees. More than a hundred thousand employees scattered throughout the country were involved. They demanded higher wages, shorter working hours, change in the order of promotion, and so on, but the walkout also had a political undertone as a strike against the government.

The walkout was well organized but poorly timed. The post and telegraph employees could easily have obtained improvements in their working conditions immediately after the October strike, but their chances became slim after the government had crushed the revolts in Kronstadt and Sebastopol. The leaders of the walkout had not consulted the Soviet in advance and asked for its help only after the strike had begun.

The Soviet was eager to do something. Even a partial success of the strike would be a political gain. But what more could it do than vote a resolution, send a telegram of sympathy to the strikers, and issue an appeal?

This was the last meeting of the Soviet I attended. I remember the beautiful hall of the Free Economic Society, the grim faces of the delegates, the speeches marked by hesitation and doubt. I sat against the wall at the rear of the hall, my eyes closed, painfully feeling the futility of words. Someone took the chair beside me and whispered in my ear:

"It is becoming dull here, isn't it?"

I recognized Eugene Litken's voice and said, "Things may change."

"Not here. Come with me, I have something for you."

In the library, Eugene told me he had met that morning, at party headquarters, a schoolteacher sent to St. Petersburg from a district of the department of Novgorod. The teachers of the district were holding a convention and planning to organize a union and asked the party for help and advice.

"Let us go there together," Eugene proposed.

"When and where is the convention?"

"It will open tomorrow morning—the place is six hours by train, on the St. Petersburg-Moscow line. We can still catch the train."

I sent a note to my mother telling her I would not be home that and the following nights, and two hours later we sat in a railroad coach full of young workers who had lost their jobs in St. Petersburg and were going to a factory not far from Moscow. They were in high spirits, sang revolutionary songs, and seemed to have no worries.

The address the schoolteacher had given to Eugene read: "Station